

**OPENING STATEMENT OF
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND SCIENCE EDUCATION
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*The Role of Community Colleges and Industry in Meeting the Demands for Skilled Production
Workers and Technicians in the 21st Century Economy*

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3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Technical training and jobs have changed significantly since the time I entered the job market. At that time, many manufacturing workers did not need a high school diploma to do their job well. Things have changed! Today, we hear from employers that the K-12 education system is not sufficiently training students to meet the demand for technically-skilled positions. My mantra has been that all jobs require a basic understanding of science and math and technical jobs are no exception. We must improve science, technology, engineering and math literacy for all students.

Despite the challenges facing our K-12 system, our workforce still remains globally competitive. I believe that is largely due to community colleges filling the gap between a high school education and employment. These institutions prepare students for the workforce, lay the foundation for further study at a four-year institution, and provide continuing education for experienced workers. I do not believe community colleges receive the recognition they deserve for providing educational services critical to our economy.

In its 2005 survey of the U.S. manufacturing workforce, the National Association for Manufacturers found that skill shortages are extremely broad and deep, cutting across industry sectors and impacting more than 80 percent of companies surveyed. In fact, the shortage is so severe in some cases that some positions remain unfilled for long periods of time.

I am glad that industry is taking action to address the skills gap and working with educational institutions to develop innovative mechanisms to attract students to these fields, instead of relying purely on traditional recruiting strategies. Companies have identified the high-performance skills of their workforce as the most critical component of their future business success. In Michigan, manufacturing accounts for almost twenty percent of the state's GDP. Like our witnesses today, Grand Rapids Community College and the Michigan Small Business and Technology Development Center are working to alleviate the skills gap between industry and education in my region. The federal government supports these goals through programs such as the Workforce Innovation and Regional Economic Development (WIRED) and the Manufacturing Extension Partnership Program (MEP).

I note that some of today's submitted witness testimony addresses the need to reverse the waning student interest and negative perception of these fields. The historic perception that technical fields are "dark, dirty, dangerous and dull" reflects the larger cultural battle we are fighting about how young people perceive science and technology. I look forward to working with you and my colleagues on making science and math more approachable and subsequently shifting attitudes towards technical education and employment.

I thank our witnesses for being here today to discuss the important topic of educating skilled technicians, and thank Chairman Baird for organizing this hearing.